
LAWSON
RHOAD
RUSSELL
27

A CAPPELLA

"A CAP PEL LA (ah cah pel ' lah) 1. In chapel or church style, i.e. sung without instrumental accompaniment. 2. In church time, i.e. with four halftones in each bar."

Funk & Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary

"YOU SHOULDN'T TRY TO PUT A TUXEDO ON THE FUNKY BLUES" LITTLE RICHARD

The term "a cappella" is as synthetic a metaphor as we are likely to encounter considering the frailities of human expression. By some quirk of appellation the word became a noun although it would have made an infinitely more effective verb. But, it's a long trek from the Rennaissance to a tenement stoop in Harlem and etymologists never were reputed to be soulful cats. While song is indigenous to the human spirit, and cuts across socio-economic strata, most latter day practitioners of a cappella are those who have been denied from the get-go. When you can't afford instruments and a high school bathroom serves as your studio, you better be satisfied with the sound of your own voice.

THE PERSUASIONS

The Persuasions, from early childhood, have been singing with and without instrumental accompaniment (mostly without), and now represent the a cappella process better than any existing group. Their repertoire includes over one hundred and sixty three songs, and they have performed everywhere from the subway station at 125th street to Lincoln Center Philharmonic Hall.

For the past fifteen years we have been recording a cappella groups and we are grateful to Capitol for this opportunity to expose the best of them to a wider audience than can fit on to a stoop — or even into a high school bathroom.

David Dashev
Stanley Krause

WE CAME TO PLAY


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JESSE RUSSELL

My name is Joseph Russell, I was born September 25, 1939, in Henderson, North Carolina. I was the second oldest child out of a family of four children. My early school days leave a trail of all types of singing from the early Honky Tonk, to gospel and so on.

I started when I was in the third grade. I was with the junior choir of my elementary school. I found it sort of a laugh later on, when I reached the eighth grade I started playing football, and it was hard finding time to meet all of my commitments. I also had a gospel group and with football and singing with the choir it was a laugh.

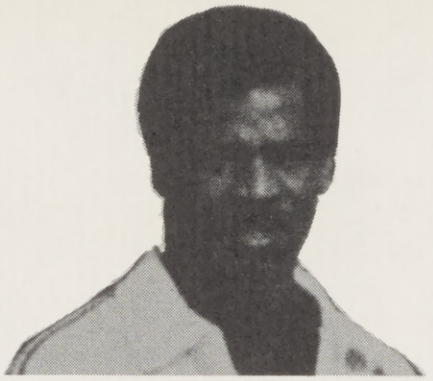
I used to average 6.9 yards per carry while playing ball, so I had to practice as often as possible to keep up my record. But, this didn't stop me from singing, because my heart was in it, and I felt I wouldn't mind making a living out of it. I started singing with my church choir, then I joined a singing group called the Southern Echoes, and then I joined another group called The New Bethel Gospel Singers, out of the three groups I thought the Southern Echoes were the best, because while I was with them I gained most of my singing experience.

In 1957, we started taking tours across the South singing at State Fairs and different churches. The group hit New York in 1959, where we were to perform at Madison Square Garden. When we finished that engagement none of the guys wanted to go back to Henderson, so we planted ourselves here and attempted to make a living.

This was during the summer vacation of my senior year in High School. After I graduated I came back to New York, but it was without the Echoes, and I started to sing with a group called the Parisians but that soon folded.

Then luck found me, I met some guys that I thought could really make it entertaining. From this meeting The Persuasions were formed, and I've been singing with the group since its beginning.

It was my idea to start the group and so I called all the fellows (only four of us at the time) together for a meeting, and we all agreed; then it was a question of which way to go, so we just went out and started singing at different clubs, and dances, etc. That worked into some good exposure because at almost every engagement we met someone who had another engagement for us. We kept going until we got our fifth man, and after he joined the group things really started moving. That is how I got to write this autobiography.



JERRY LAWSON

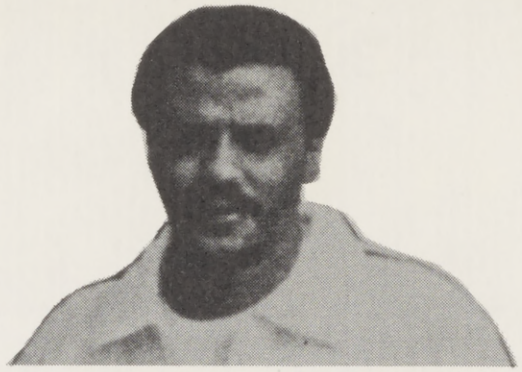
I, Jerry Lawson was born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, January 23rd, 1944. I moved to Philadelphia, as an infant and my first recollection of music was listening to spirituals on Philadelphia radio stations at the age of 5. At the age of 6 my mother moved to Apopka, Florida where I started school.

Phyllis Wheatley was the name of the school I attended from 1st to 12th grade, and in those years I only missed 2 days, a school record. When I entered High School I was performing in plays that Freshmen couldn't even come to see. I went to four Jr. and Sr. Proms because of my singing ability. I was a drummer and a trumpet player in the high school band. I played right half back for the school's football team (this helped me become a quick change artist, because at half time I would have to change my football uniform into my band uniform and back again).

With the help of my mother I was also active in the church, being just one of so many lead singers in the Jr. choirs gave me a lot of experience. Then I met Mrs. Vi Johnson and began to make personal appearances at dances, fashion shows, etc.

Mr. L. C. Thomas was one of the most inspiring people of my life, because he would sit and tell me about New York. Everyday I would go to his house and listen to the stories he would tell. I told him that I was going to New York and try it; he said that it's not going to be easy and he was right, but even if I never reach the height that some singers do, I can truly say and mean it from the bottom of my heart, since being with The Persuasions, I really feel that I am a professional singer, I could go on and on, but that would take three weeks or more so I shall stop. stop. stop.

Jerry Lawson



JIMMY HAYES

I became interested in singing at an early age (around 5), and used to sing Gospel while still in elementary school. I entered my High School Choir, and it became my main interest. (A cappella, that was). Every year at the high school choir festival, mine always received superior ratings.

During my teen life I started singing rock n' roll, with a group called The Five B's. The Five B's consisted mostly of older fellows than myself. I left town to go with another group, The El Don Days, next Irvin & The Kats. Then back to spirituals with the Hopewell Jubilee, a gospel group that consisted of much older men. I think I must have had a complex about being so young and singing with older guys. A couple of other groups, then I joined the Marine Corps.

After serving my time in the service, I docked in the Port of Harlem U.S.A. There I met the street corner singers and took up with them. But not for long, leaving Harlem, I came to Bedford-Stuyvesant U.S.A.

One sunny summer day I met a cat on the streets singing his heart out, I think he was trying to impress, to impress me, so I walked over to him and said, "Hey man, do you sing?" He answered, "yeah, do you?", so I told him a little. He asked me if I would like to audition for his group. (Big Deal.) So I played along saying sure.

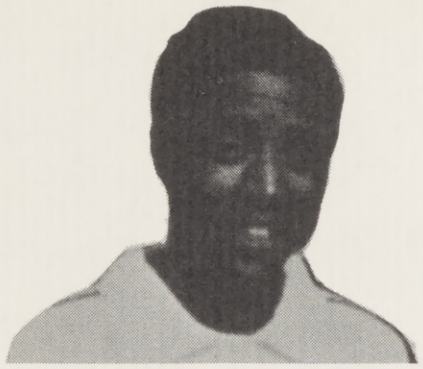
I got together with his group and passed the test. They had a pretty nice sound but something happened and The Shufflers busted up. By the way, that was the name of that group and the guy was Jerry.

We became very very close friends, being always together; I don't care to mention some of the things we got into. Later we ran across Jessie, and Prince, a former member of The Persuasions. Then came Tubo after Prince left, then Andrew, another former Persuasion. Andrew left the group for reasons of his own.

During the time he left, I had the job of singing 1st tenor and bass. Singing both 1st and bass became a hell of a job so I had to resign as 1st tenor and just do my very own thing which is the bottom. That was when The Persuasions took on their newest member Jayotis, how we needed that boy.

Since that time The Persuasions have been steadily on the up grade. Devoting time, energy, stamina and everything else to our quest of making it to the top with a beautiful bunch of guys whom I admire tremendously, "The Persuasions." Good luck and keep on pushing.

THE PERSUASIONS



HERBERT RHOAD

Was born October 1, 1944 in Bamberg County, South Carolina. I stayed in the south until I was six years old, attended kindergarten at the Oak Grove School in Bamberg, and was a member of the Hickory Hill Baptist Church.

I was raised an only child and during my early years, my father left South Carolina and headed for New York; got situated and sent for my mother and myself. We settled in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where I attended Public School, and Jr. High School. During this time I participated in all school plays, and musical programs, as a singer and dancer, or any other capacity I thought I could fit in. I sang solo and harmony in the school choir, I also played 1st and 2nd trumpet during my three years in Jr. High School.

Just before my first year in High School, my mother and I left Williamsburg and moved to the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, this was in 1958. In 1956 my father was killed in a fire, and my mother wanted to change our environment.

Music had always played a big part in my life, after I came to New York, I joined the Friendship Christian Church, and there along with five cousins we started a gospel group. We were known as The Friendship Gospel Singers, and we went from church to church singing on different programs. I was also a member of the senior choir of this church.

In 1958, in my first year of High School, I met a young man who wanted to start a singing group. He approached me with an idea and the names of a few more fellows who were interested. I had been singing with a group (my first rock and roll group), known as The El-Tones, which had split up. Then I thought back to the days of Allen Freed, when my mother and I turned to music as a sort of consolation after the death of my father. We used to go to the old Paramount Theater, in downtown Brooklyn to see Mr. Freed's rock and roll shows, and it was at one such show that I promised myself that I would put forth every effort, so that one day people would come to see me perform.

So I took this fellow up on his offer, and from there we formed a group called The Parisians, then it was the long hard job of trying to make it in the entertainment business. After about two years of struggling and trying to prepare ourselves, we signed with a small independent company. It was "Pova" records. They released our first single about nine months later. The recording was "On The Sunny Side Of The Street," which didn't do us much justice, but it did give us a little more experience and exposure.

After that, we kept pushing, trying one way after another to get a break, then our lead singer gave it up and joined the Army, so we were looking for another lead singer, this is when I met Joseph Russell, and he took over the lead for the group. After a while he stopped singing and group broke up again, so it was another two years of knocking around until Joseph Russell called me one day and said he was trying to get a group started, so I went down and from that first day, The Persuasions were formed.

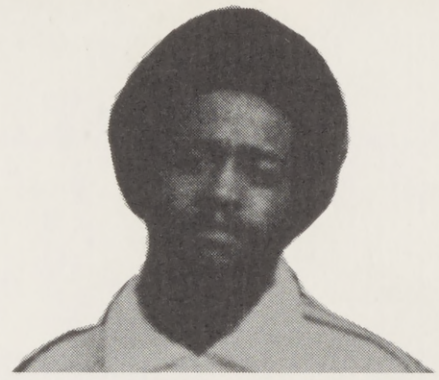
JAYOTIS WASHINGTON

I used to sing in church, The Baptist Church of Christ in Detroit. I was around six or seven, but that didn't last long. By the time I was ten, I was in New York.

Starting from the ghettos I just began hearing groups like The Clovers, Cardinals, The Crows, and The Dominoes and many more, like I dug that. I remember when I used to live on 134th Street in Harlem, I would hear this group on the first floor apartment sounding good. I never saw them until later. They had the sound of a gospel group. Every Sunday I used to dig them until they left. The white station wagon with the names, Clyde McPhatter and The Drifters.

I guess I really started singing when I was eleven, like I was in a home and I used to hear these guys make harmony, you know like they make cotton candy, blending until it gets good together. One day I was listening and they asked me if I wanted to sing or if I knew how to sing. Like, I said I didn't know. Oh yeah, I guess they must have heard me do something in the showers. But anyway, this guy Eddie Garcia was teaching me the difference between off-key and harmony. Damn it was so easy, and later I found out why. Like if you don't have an ear for singing, forget it.

The first song I learned in a group was, "Lilly Mae Bell" by The Valentines. I was in about six groups and I can proudly say I was never the first to quit, in fact I was kind of lucky. I sang a little with The Harptones when they were trying to get back together, man they were heavy. I also sang with The Genies.



JAYOTIS WASHINGTON

But, for one reason or another nothing ever worked out, in fact it seemed like nothing was working out. I'm a happy person when I am singing, but very unnecessary when I'm not. But I'm glad that I wasn't lucky because I believe I wouldn't have made it as a singer, let alone a performer. I didn't know anything. But the experience was sweet.

I remember a group I was in called The Delmonts; we were nice. Everyone could sing, our first tenor, John was a brother to Joe Negioni of The Teenagers. That lasted four years. I started getting the feeling that someday I was going to make it. Then I started singing with a group called The Interios and we were nice, in fact every group I was in was an advance from good to better. I hope I'm not making this sound like peaches and cream, far from it. It was just that I like what I was doing, and the hardships along with it.

Man, you want to know something? There were so many good people involved around my singing. My sisters, Catherine and Jessie were always letting me know in one way or another that I was going to make it. Not excluding my younger brothers and sisters. My mother, well she is just too much for words, without her pushing me and giving me courage, well, you know how those things are with mothers. I haven't made it yet, but there are so many, many people who have had faith in me, in my ups and downs.

I was born in Detroit, Michigan on May 12, 1945 and I've been singing in front of people since I was nine and still looking for experience. I wanted to be a performer in the worst way. I remember how I used to ask my family, you know, my mother, sister and all, for money to buy an outfit because we were singing at some amateur show for maybe a dollar if we were lucky, and like in my family, as in others, forty or fifty dollars was a lot of money.

Then I met The Peruasions, a fine bunch of brothers, beautiful in fact. Man they are together. We've been through and still are going through our trials and tribulations at being men first, then performers. I remember one of the members of The Miracles used to be our paper boy on St. Auban in Detroit. I don't remember his name, but I know it was him. I also have a few goals, in the beginning there was just one, but as I go through life I found out more. I want my family to know that what I'm doing is not just for me but them as well. I want my children to be good people in life. You know, I used to be practicing at times and imagine I was at The Copa or Filmore in New York, even the Sands Hotel in Vegas just doing my thing, just doing it.

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